

Concluding Report

Food Stamp Application Processing: Essential Elements of Eligibility Processing

Course Background

The Food Stamp Application Processing course was conceived as a distance learning presentation that used existing and familiar training technology to highlight certain areas where errors continue to be found in Food Stamp cases. Policy changes implemented in 2003 were also reviewed. The goal was to help workers improve accuracy in FS eligibility determinations .

A workgroup involving staff from Training, Policy, Quality Assurance, the Call Center and PAC participated in the development of the course. The training was not mandatory, but DHFS Secretary Helene Nelson strongly encouraged agencies to take advantage of the training opportunity.

Part I of the course was a 30 question online Food Stamp policy quiz. Part II was a study guide/workbook that focused on problem areas and recently implemented policies. Part III was an interactive online activity that used Authorware to present simulated CARES screens. The focus of the activity was finding incorrect CARES entries that caused Food Stamp benefit determinations to be incorrect.

Flexibility

While the course was designed for completion by individuals, agencies used a variety of approaches in presenting it. The majority of workers completed the Part I quiz online individually, but several agencies used the quiz in written form as a group. Other agencies completed the quiz online in a group environment with an opportunity for discussion.

This flexibility carried over into completion of the Part II workbook. In the evaluation for the course, 70% of participants indicated they completed the workbook on their own. 21% did it with a group. The PAC was active in assisting several local agencies with completion of the workbook in group settings.

Participation and Completion Statistics

TRACKING

Completion of Parts I and III (the online activities) was tracked and several statistical factors were analyzed. Since Part II was a workbook, we were not able to track completion of that portion of the course. A worker who completed both Parts I and III was also assumed to have completed Part II and is given credit for completing the entire course in the Pathlore system. A detailed report of participation and completion by agency is attached to this summary.

COURSE ACCESS

Over 1000 Food Stamp workers statewide completed at least some portion of this course. That is about 89% of the estimated 1128 workers in the state. All county agencies and all but two tribes had at least some workers participating. There were 39 counties (including Milwaukee) and 3 tribes where 100% of staff took at least some portion of the course.

COURSE COMPLETION

Over half of all workers in the state (640 or 56.7%) completed the entire course. Several agencies and one tribe had 100% completion. Several larger agencies had 75% or more of their workers completing the course. Milwaukee's completion rate was 64%.

SCORES

The website used to deliver the quiz also tracked scores. The average statewide score on the quiz was 76%. The average Milwaukee score was 65%. There were 28 perfect scores statewide and 35 who missed only one question.

The low score was 37%. 103 people scored less than 60% (representing 9% of all workers statewide). 60 of those were in Milwaukee.

Individuals who completed the quiz did learn their individual score, but there was no scoring report of individuals given to agencies. Our intent in tracking scores was not to measure job performance or policy knowledge of individuals, but to look for overall trends and find ways that training may be targeted to address issues. Participation data was shared with local agencies via the regional offices.

Summary of Evaluation Data

An online evaluation of the entire course was conducted at the end of the Part III activity. Some interesting points included:

- Only 34% of respondents used the online FS handbook while completing activities (this was suggested in the course).
- 92% were able to access the Authorware activity with little or no difficulty (even though it involved the downloading of a plugin for their web browser).
- 80% said they were able to complete the course in the anticipated amount of time (45 minutes for the Part I quiz, 4 1/2 hours for the Part II workbook and 45 minutes for the Part III Authorware activity).

When asked which method of presentation they would like to see used in future training, 68% favored the Authorware CARES simulation and 67% also liked the online quiz. 51% selected the workbook.

Selected Excerpts from Evaluations

The evaluation gave an opportunity for participants to comment on the course. This is a sampling of responses: *(more excerpts available upon request)*

- with all of the changes occurring, it's nice to have refresher courses
- i think part ii should have been shorter since it would have been difficult for anyone to complete during regular work hrs with our busy schedules. had to do that outside of work on a weekend
- this was an excellent experience. i think it should be available, with new scenarios at least once per year, so that workers could continually test their knowledge.
- took a little bit to access and get used to this method of training.
- i like part i and iii much better than part ii. it was easier to do as a group. it would be nice to have exercises like part i on a regular basis like we do coaches corners. i think quiz i was also a better format than coaches corners is.
- this is nice because i could do it from home without distractions.
- parts seemed pretty easy, but i found that i got caught in two instances. this was a great review; it shows how easy it is to make mistakes on the basics. one thing i have always been doing wrong is the end dating. cares does not allow you to change the begin date and then end date the segment at the same time so i always used the same end date as what was already in the begin date. common sense should have told me that was wrong. the back to basics trainings are the ones i really like. no matter how long you do this job it's easy to miss something. if you know all of the answers in the training then it's a great boost for your self esteem.
- i liked all the components of course. each component has it's strong points. going through this process help refresh policies that i know i know but was forgetting to apply in my every day job duties.
- i was interrupted too many times trying to complete this. it does not work well, doing this at my desk. i do not retain things as well looking at the computer screen--do significantly better via written papers. the written process also allows me to escape and complete this elsewhere where i am not interrupted.
- it is helpful, but took too much of our time from our busy schedule.
- the best part is being able to take the course without leaving the office. it is a great way to have all staff take the course at different times and hold down costs.
- it would be nice to try and get some combination of the workbook and cares simulation together so that the simulation was a few more scenarios/questions. it would also be nice to have some questions about unearned income such as child support.
- the whole experience was a valuable retraining tool. i used the workbook in my team meetings, so my whole unit went through it together.
- i thought the quiz was kind of tricky, the workbook a little too easy and the simulation fun.
- still like interaction with a trainer
- i think as workers we should have the opportunity to take courses like this every year, for other programs as well. i think we could all use a refresher in ma once a year also.
- my experience with all three parts was great. i learned something in each part. i'd like to see some of this required. i don't know if most of our workers completed all three sections and i feel it was really a benefit. guess the supervisor should have been more on-board with this. everyone is busy, but training is essential to continue to do our jobs well. thanks to all who worked on this training. very well done and much appreciated.